



JB Pritzker, Governor

Grace B. Hou, Secretary

100 South Grand Avenue, East • Springfield, Illinois 62762
401 South Clinton Street • Chicago, Illinois 60607

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Contact:

Meghan Powers, meghanpowers@illinois.gov

Patrick Laughlin, patrick.laughlin@illinois.gov

IDHS to close remaining local office lobbies as Covid-19 peaks in Illinois; all benefits remain available

Consumers still urged to stay home; all benefits applications fully available by phone and online; local staff responding by phone and will continue handling local emergency assistance needs

CHICAGO/SPRINGFIELD - Today, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) is taking another step to protect its staff and residents of Illinois by temporarily closing 11 Family Community Resource Centers (FCRCs) to the public, starting Thursday, April 16. In ordinary times, IDHS operates 75 FCRCs, the public facing offices individuals and families can use to secure essential nutrition, income and medical supports.

IDHS's principle goal is to ensure that all eligible residents can receive life-sustaining benefits while protecting the safety and health of all staff and customers.

"This is not a decision we make lightly. However, we have to balance the urgent needs of residents facing hunger and poverty with extremely serious public health directives. Even as many IDHS offices close, our State's safety net remains available," said IDHS Secretary Grace B. Hou. "Please know that every local office has an *urgent call team* available to respond right away to emergency cases." (The phone numbers of local urgent call teams are online and posted on the front doors of all FCRC offices.)

Since last month, IDHS has been urging customers to stay home unless absolutely necessary. Foot traffic into local offices has plummeted, while online and telephone applications for food and medical benefits are skyrocketing, with nearly 30,000 people seeking first-time medical or food benefits each week compared to the usual 10,000 weekly applications.

"The coronavirus crisis calls upon IDHS and all of us to address difficult and unprecedented questions. There are strong competing priorities. It is essential to try to balance the safety of people needing assistance, the workers who serve them, and the general public in the effort to control the spread of the virus. It is also essential to get vital services to people with heightened needs in this difficult time. IDHS's plan for how to address all of these factors appears to strike the right balance. We will, of course, continue to monitor the situation closely and contribute to any needed improvements. We commend IDHS for this decisive, but also careful and balanced approach," said John Bouman, President of the Shriver Center.



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IDHS continues to encourage all customers to apply for and manage their benefits online at www.ABE.Illinois.Gov and to call the IDHS *Help is Here* toll-free line at 1-833-2-FIND-HELP. IDHS will keep both its customers and employees updated as to office re-openings in the weeks ahead.

Since March 29, 14 of Illinois' 75 public facing FCRCs remained open, with a reduced workforce and a variety of safeguards in place to reduce the spread of the coronavirus. As of today, 11 local offices remain open. Three (in Rockford, Chicago's Englewood neighborhood and in West Suburban Melrose Park) were recently closed out of an abundance of caution following positive COVID-19 tests of staff employed in those offices.

Staff who usually work in the public-facing FCRCs will work remotely to process important benefits, and about 180 ABE (Access to Benefits Electronically) call center agents will be taking calls from customers across the state. IDHS is also exploring making non-public "back offices" available to IDHS staff who find themselves unable to work from home due to technology limitations – so casework and telephone support can continue to the maximum possible extent.

The department has developed each of its significant local office changes throughout the COVID-19 emergency in strong partnership with AFSCME Council 31, hunger relief and disability rights advocacy organizations across the state.

IDHS continues preparing to broaden and strengthen all of its remote options for consumers - and will use every available resource to ensure that residents of Illinois are not harmed by this temporary reorganization.

More information about COVID-19 is available at www.CoronaVirus.Illinois.Gov and through the COVID-19 Hotline, at 1-800-889-3931.

Public Service Announcement urging IDHS to use online and phone resources: <https://www2.illinois.gov/cms/agency/media/radio/Pages/psa.aspx> and <http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=123673>

Map of the Family Community Resource Center
Locations: <http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=123570>